

# Life happens!

14 June – 23 December 2023

Life happens! It goes in directions we never expected, but sometimes also in ways we always imagined. So is life something that we don't actively do, but rather that „happens“ to us? How much influence do we actually have ourselves, what is fate, what is coincidence, what is higher power?

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the protagonists of the exhibition – Gertrud Frey, Shaul Knaz, Sinai Mutzner and Margrit Schlumpf-Portmann – deal with these questions in their works. Everything revolves around life and how the artists experience not only their environment and their time, but also their own hopes for life.

Art becomes a survival strategy.

## Gertrud Frey

\*1952 in Bülach (CH) – †2022 in Guntershausen (CH)

If there was one constant in Gertrud Frey's life, it was art. Over 600 drawings and paintings were discovered in her estate after Frey's death in 2022: paradisiacal, colourful sceneries, stringently ordered geometric compositions, harmonious pictorial worlds that often have something textile about them. Gertrud Frey longed for this overlay for her life, which was far from perfection and harmony. After an apprenticeship as a kindergarten teacher, she worked as a cleaner, newspaper deliverer and childminder – interrupted again and again by stays in psychiatric hospitals: Rheinau, Burghölzli, the «Haus zur Stauffacherin», a re-sidential community for women with mental impairments, and finally the Brünliacker house. Depression determined her unsteady life, jobs were rarely permanent, sometimes Frey lived in shared flats, sometimes in squats or attics, again and again she was on the move in Zurich's Niederdorf. But the inner and outer restlessness did not stop her from reaching for brush and paint. If the here and now was anything but paradise, her paintings should at least be, and through painting the Bülach-born artist tried to come close to this state.

«December Mood», «Couple in Autumn Landscape» or «Fantasy» – the titles she gave her works are as banal as they are meaningful, considering the discrepancy between the cheerful



Gertrud Frey, Gold-Silberakzente, 2008

and hopeful-looking pictures and the despair and sadness of the person behind them. Throughout her life, Gertrud Frey longed to arrive, to lead a «perfect» life in harmony – a longing that found its fulfilment not in real life, but at least in art.

## Shaul Knaz

\*1938 in Gan Shmuel (ISR) – †2022 ibid

Throughout his life, Shaul Knaz sought the balance between the opposites, spreading the contradictions of the human condition before him and us like a carpet: Attraction and repulsion, love and hate, togetherness and loneliness.

Born in 1939 in Kibbutz Gan Shmuel near Hedera, Knaz earned his living in the early years of his career mainly with commissioned work as a graphic artist, illustrator, political cartoonist and designer of projects within the kibbutz. Before that, he had studied painting at the Avni Institute of Art and Design. However, he put his heart and soul into his own works, colourful mosaics full of repetitive small pictures – mostly human figures, but also everyday objects, sometimes scraps of words and sentences – with which he filled the canvases in his studio over and over.

The hidden pictures evoke memories of Keith Haring's stick figures, but their childlike naivety also evokes associations with archaic cave paintings. Over the years and decades, Shaul Knaz developed a style that reflects his thoughts, indeed his



Shaul Knaz, no name

entire world, translating them into pictures and entire picture stories. Through their contours, the figures and objects are clearly defined, sometimes they seem like pictograms that seem to convey a message to us. The image becomes a visual text.

Man and woman and their ambivalent relationship to each other, but also home, society and war, are the central themes in Knaz's work. Tanks stand next to playing children, order and chaos merge seamlessly. For the artist Yuval Danieli, Knaz's pictorial worlds are reminiscent of Andalusian tapestries: «Carpets are woven out of hundreds of folkloristic items which together create an impressive aggregate. So Saul Knaz weaves together a tapestry of his life. His personal story is Gan Samuel.» Feelings, stories and experiences condense in his paintings, becoming a «circus of life», as Saul Knaz himself has called it. Love and happiness, loneliness and conflict – everything lies before us like an open book.

How do we want to look at it, read it, interpret it, understand it? Shaul Knaz owes us the answer – and makes his work all the more exciting.

## Sinai Mutzner \*1997 in Wichtrach (CH)

Sinai Mutzner studied fine arts at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (HKG) in Basel. Her work is shaped by her role as a young mother, the social expectations that come with it, and above all her personal experiences as a mother, woman and artist in today's world.

The audio installation 24/7 thematises the omnipresence that being a mother entails. In six sound tracks, which are reproduced in the room by means of six loudspeakers, she lays task after task, requirement and demand on top of each other like layers, describes the actual state, the target state and the emotions that come with the new role. «You get bombarded, almost overwhelmed with the audio and all the information, and you also feel a little lost – and that's exactly what it's like to be a mother, you get a little lost in that too», she says, describing her work. «I want the listeners to feel that and also to be able to empathise a little bit with that situation.»

The audio artist has participated in group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Basel (We are so many here, 2022), Kunsthaus Baselland (Peace or never, 2022) and Kunstraum Bella in Zurich (weil's persönlich ist, 2021).

Sinai Mutzner lives in Zurich with her daughter.



Sinai Mutzner with her daughter Sola, 2022



## Margrit Schlumpf-Portmann

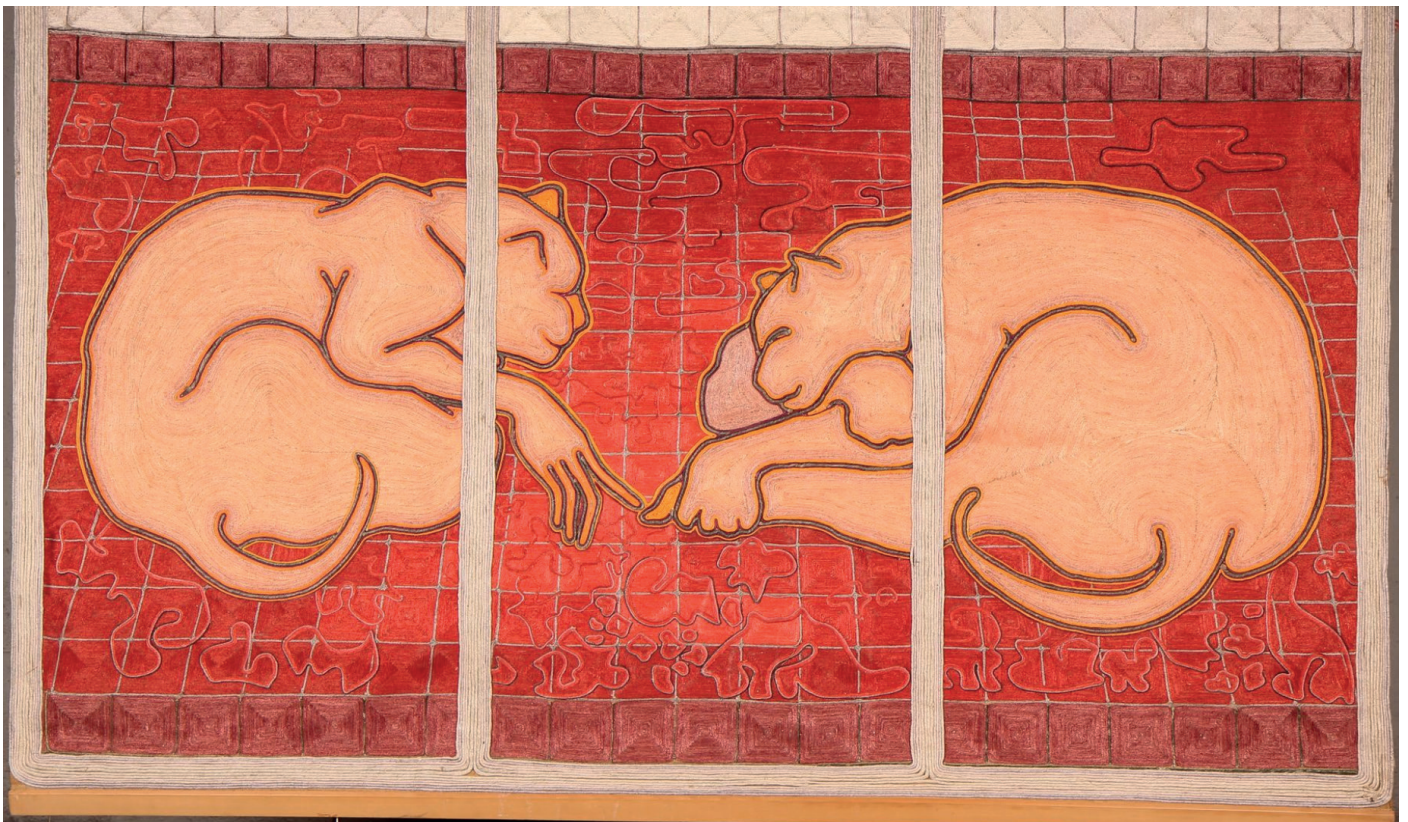
\*1931 in Wald (CH) – †2017 in Bauma (CH)

Drawings, etchings and paintings, textile art, sculptures and placemaking – Margrit Schlumpf-Portmann's work is as diverse as the artist herself.

Born in 1931 in Wald (ZH), Schlumpf-Portmann worked mainly as a stage designer and film equipment maker until the 1960s, before devoting herself entirely to her artistic work. At a time when society preferred to see women sitting at the cooker or with the embroidery hoop in the living room, Schlumpf-Portmann dared to break out of conventions, to break with what was commonly labelled «male» or «female». Instead of crocheting or embroidering her large-format «cord paintings», Schlumpf-Portmann took up glue, glued the hemp and cotton cords she had

died herself tightly together and formed abex-amination of her role as a woman and an artist. More and more frequently, she critically expressed the relationship between the sexes in her pictorial themes – a position that reflected both her own situation and the social reality of the time. From the mid-1980s onwards, she increasingly devoted herself to sculpture, with the feminine and feminist resonating here as well. The focus of this creative phase was the child: Schlumpf-Portmann modelled «dolls» and baby figures, which can also be found as dense tangles in the «hemispheres», the brain-like objects that she placed in nature as installations.

After Schlumpf-Portmann lived in Aathal for decades and worked there as an artist, from 2000 until her death in 2017 she worked mainly in her studio in the Spinnerei Schönau in Wetzikon.



Margrit Schlumpf-Portmann, Machtspiele, 1980

Concept: Manuela Hitz, Sandra Smolcic  
Curation: Manuela Hitz  
Text: Sandra Smolcic  
Translation: Renata Huber (French), Sandra Smolcic (English)  
Loans: The Knaz Family, Hezie Lavi  
Exhibition setup: Alex Cekic, Norbert Günther, Stella Jarvis,  
Sarah Lebeck-Jobe  
Art Education: Manuela Hitz, Sandra Smolcic

The exhibition «Life happens!» was generously supported by:  
Prof. Otto Beisheim Stiftung, Dr. Jörg Furrer, Dr. Georg und Josi Guggenheim-Stiftung, Ernst Göhner Stiftung, Hirschmann-Stiftung, Kresau4-Stiftung, Migros Kulturprozent, Ellen und Michael Ringier, Schule+Kultur Zürich, Stadt Zürich Schulkultur, Georg und Bertha Schwyzer-Winiker-Stiftung, Alfred und Ilse Stammer Stiftung, Elisabeth Weber Stiftung, and other foundations as well as members and patrons of the Musée Visionnaire association.

Special thanks go to the volunteers at the reception and behind the scenes, as well as to all the people who support the Musée Visionnaire in any way.

MUSÉE VISIONNAIRE  
Predigerplatz 10, 8001 Zurich  
+41 (0)44 251 66 57  
info@museevisionnaire.ch  
www.museevisionnaire.ch  
#museevisionnaire